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ABSTRACT

Crime Prevention deals with the effort to control crime and the fear of crime through a variety of community resources. Research efforts of the Department of Justice, first developed in the early 1970's, focused on increasing knowledge and understanding to promote more effective crime prevention. The National Institute of Justice has sponsored numerous studies of crime and the environment. Evaluations of these studies conclude that neighborhood security can be influenced through use of environmental, community, and police strategies that help increase residents' feelings of responsibility for their neighborhoods. Citizen action programs can also be effective in reinforcing crime prevention strategies. Future research needs should include studying those factors that produce criminal behavior as well as the relationship between crime and other social problems. (JAC)

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CRIME PREVENTION RESEARCH AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

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Crime Prevention Research at the National Level

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Introduction

It may be useful to begin with a brief discussion about the nature and scope of crime prevention activities in order to provide a general framework for considering both research and action programs in this area. Crime prevention deals with the effort to control crime and the fear of crime through a variety of community resources and mechanisms. The focus is directed at preventing crime and enhancing security on an individual, neighborhood and broader community basis. Therefore, attention needs to be given to the actions and response of citizens and community groups in dealing with crime as well as the policies and practices of organizations and agencies operating in both the public and private sectors of the community.

The actions that citizens can take in the crime prevention area are designed to reduce their vulnerability to crime; to increase their sense of safety and security; and to enhance the operations and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. Citizen actions may be individual or collective in nature and often address both personal and neighborhood concerns about crime and its consequences.

The policies and practices of public and private organizations

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and agencies can influence the offender's need and desire to commit crime; can serve to reduce criminal opportunity; and may also provide social and economic incentives for crime prevention activities. Local governmental actions regarding city planning, security ordinances, land use and zoning and architectural and urban design can also be instrumental in promoting effective community crime prevention.

Crime Prevention Research

Department of Justice research efforts in the crime prevention area were first developed in the early 1970's. The objectives of this research are to increase our knowledge and understanding in order to promote more effective crime prevention behavior on the part of citizens and community groups and to influence the policies and practices of public and private agencies and institutions with regard to the prevention and control of crime. The goal here is to make optimal use of various community resources available outside of the criminal justice system that can impact on crime and its prevention. The most appropriate interface of such crime prevention activities with criminal justice operations is also a major concern.

While the initial focus of crime prevention research was quite broad, several major topics have received priority attention. These include issues relating to crime and the environment and citizen and community action relevant to crime prevention. In each of these problem areas, research has been directed at increasing our understanding of the issues that are instrumental in promoting effective crime prevention as well as the factors that constrain such activities. In addition, attention has been given to problems relating to the

planning, implementation and evaluation of crime prevention programs and activities.

Since its inception 10 years ago, the National Institute has sponsored a number of studies of crime and the environment. Much of the early work which was conducted in public housing projects found that physical design features can affect both the rate of crime and the residents' perceptions of security. From this research emerged the concept of "defensible space" which suggests that design can be used to encourage proprietary attitudes and a sense of territorial concern as well as providing opportunity for natural surveillance to prevent and control crime. These and other architectural design concepts are intended to enhance security through informal social control which allows citizens to assist in the protection of those areas in which they live and work.

Door and window security standards have also been developed with Institute funding and can be incorporated into housing and construction codes in order to increase building security. Other Institute research has addressed the design and utilization of building alarm systems, environmental factors that influence vulnerability to burglary, as well as commercial and street robbery and the effects of street lighting on crime and the fear of crime.

Drawing on these studies as well as other research on the environment, the Institute supported several field applications in this area. These included a systematic approach for defining the specific crime problems to be addressed, planning and developing programs that integrated a variety of crime prevention strategies,

and evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of the program efforts. The initial effort involved a neighborhood crime control project in Hartford which combined changes in the physical characteristics of a neighborhood (to affect the volume and flow of traffic) with police and resident activities in order to increase resident control of the neighborhood and to reduce criminal opportunity. Extensive evaluations were carried out of the program and its impact on crime, fear of crime, and the quality of life in the neighborhood. In general, it was found that crimes such as burglary and robbery were initially reduced but that their rates then rose again corresponding generally to a severe cutback in the police component of the program. The other aspects of the program showed consistent positive effects. Commuter traffic through the area was reduced and local residents increased their use of neighborhood streets and parks. Citizens indicated more willingness to use neighbors as resources against crime, and there was a greater recognition of strangers in the neighborhood and more willingness to intervene in suspicious situations. In addition, the residents fear of crime and their perceptions of crime as a serious problem decreased significantly and their overall optimism about the neighborhood atmosphere have been accompanied by an improvement in the economic viability of the neighborhood, reflected in increased business and resident investment and renovation.

The evaluators concluded that neighborhood safety and security can be influenced through the use of environmental, community and police strategies which help to increase the residents feelings of responsibility for their neighborhood and their use of informal social control over occurrences in their community. Residents are likely to be less fearful when they feel that they are part of a community in which citizens and police work together

to control events in their neighborhood.

Other Institute research is examining the relationship between crime factors and various neighborhood characteristics. For example, attention is being given to the manner in which certain environmental features and attributes strengthen informal social control behaviors and thus contribute to neighborhood safety. Conditions that may increase a neighborhood's susceptibility to a cycle of crime, decline and abandonment are also being addressed. The objectives here are to determine how personal commitment to a neighborhood, and in turn decisions leading to abandonment and decline are affected by such conditions as social change, the physical attractiveness of an area and the incidence and perception of crime. An effort is also being made to identify the nature of the relationships as well as the interaction between changes in the life cycle of a neighborhood and crime.

Attention has also been given to the processes by which some urban neighborhoods maintain safety and security despite their proximity to high crime areas. Patterns of social control were examined as well as the physical and social characteristics that appear to support these processes. Changing community residential patterns are also being examined over time to assess their relationship to crime patterns. In addition, research is addressing neighborhood and community development patterns in order to note their impact on the demand for criminal justice services as well as their influences on crime and the fear of crime.

The National Institute has also devoted special attention to citizen and community actions relevant to crime prevention. In addressing citizen involvement in crime prevention and control activities, consideration has been given to citizen actions that can impede crime, enhance security, and promote the administration of justice. For example, Institute research has highlighted the importance of individual citizen actions in protecting themselves and their homes, as well as citizen cooperation with police at the crime scene and as witnesses in court. The research findings indicate that citizen actions involving simple security measures (e.g., use of locks on doors and windows, lights) can reduce vulnerability to crime in residential settings. In general, persons can reduce their likelihood of victimization through various forms of protective behavior and by avoiding areas or activities that increase their exposure to the risks of victimization.

With regard to surveillance and reporting possible crimes or suspicious behavior, present evidence indicates that citizen intervention and action will be more likely when persons know one another or have at least had some previous contact. This suggests that efforts to increase social interaction and neighboring could be useful. In terms of crimes that in fact do occur, only about one-third are actually reported to police. This behavior is apparently influenced by citizen attitudes regarding the importance of the incident as well as their concern about involvement with the criminal justice system.

Citizen actions and behavior can also influence the criminal

justice process as it relates to police response and the investigation and prosecution of criminal offenses. Studies have shown that the time lapse between a criminal incident and the call to the police appears to be more critical than the time it takes police to respond to the call. Prompt citizen reporting has been found to be important in realizing positive outcomes in terms of arrest and witness availability - with delays in citizen reporting tending to nullify the potential impact of rapid police response. Assistance provided by victims and witnesses has also been found to be critical with regard to successful investigations and the likelihood of obtaining convictions in criminal cases. Research indicates that without the assistance of victims or witnesses in identifying a suspect, the chances of a successful criminal investigation are often very slim. In addition, lay witnesses have been found to be the most important factor in obtaining convictions in the typical street crime offense.

Research addressing various citizen crime prevention efforts has also focussed on collective forms of citizen action. For example, the Institute has published reports that relate to the development, implementation and evaluation of programs dealing with Citizen Patrols, Citizen Crime Reporting, Home Security, and Property Identification Projects. A community crime prevention program developed in Seattle has also been defined as an Exemplary Project by the Institute since its structure and organization have been shown to be effective in mobilizing citizen action and reducing crime. The information developed by Institute research in this area is designed to be useful to community organizations, program planners, criminal justice personnel

and the public at large interested in crime prevention activities. A national media campaign on crime prevention is currently using Institute materials to inform citizens and influence public behavior in this area. The focus of the campaign deals with a shared responsibility to prevent crime through both individual and collective forms of action.

The research findings on citizen action programs indicate that a number of these efforts can be useful in increasing security and reducing citizen fear of crime. In addition, programs that involve a neighborhood approach and which include a combination of crime prevention strategies are more likely to be effective since such activities may reinforce one another. Personal contacts with citizens in small groups and in their homes appear to be useful in stimulating citizen involvement in crime prevention. Current evaluative research on community anti-crime programs is focussing on the institutionalization of these programs, the development of cooperative relationships between community groups and components of the criminal justice system and an assessment of the degree to which these programs represent the various concerns of the community.

The Institute is also supporting research which is exploring the urban locales that are the settings for various kinds of crime prevention activities. Attention has been given to the types of crime prevention strategies selected by particular kinds of neighborhoods and organizations, the relationship of police services to various forms of collective citizen responses and the relationship between individual reactions to crime and participation in neighborhood programs.

This research on community reactions to crime indicates that

it is important to consider the neighborhood context in which crime prevention activities are carried out. The research also highlights the relevance of informal social control in preventing crime and increasing security. This is consistent with the program experiences in residential areas in which neighborhood-based programs are developed to encourage surveillance and protective neighboring as well as private security actions.

Future Crime Prevention Research.

A number of issues need to be addressed in more detail in the 1980's in order to enhance our understanding about the nature and effectiveness of crime prevention efforts. As official criminal justice resources for dealing with crime become more limited, the actions of citizens and the community take on an even greater significance with respect to the problems in this area. As a result, special research attention needs to be given to the most useful means of mobilizing and sustaining various forms of citizen action and community response relevant to crime prevention. More knowledge is also needed about the social and institutional factors that influence citizen behavior and community action dealing with crime prevention and the effectiveness of these actions in reducing victimization and fear of crime. The broader impact of these activities also need to be considered in terms of promoting a sense of community as well as a means of empowerment. We also need a better understanding of the mechanisms that can be used to successfully plan, implement and evaluate crime prevention strategies in particular community settings. Research which assists communities in defining their crime problems and appropriately matching crime

prevention efforts to these problems and the resources available should receive special attention. In addition, there is a need for more knowledge about issues dealing with safety and security in relation to other problems affecting the quality of life in various urban settings.

More specifically, attention should continue to be given to the determinants of crime prevention actions in terms of the factors that influence both private-minded and public-minded forms of crime prevention behavior and response. Fear of crime and its impact on community life is a major concern that will also require more systematic attention in the 1980's. Consideration of the institutional, organizational and social-psychological factors that influence perceived safety and security should be addressed as well as the mechanisms for reducing fear of crime and the means of dealing with the personal and social consequences of such fear. Citizen fear of crime should also be examined in relation to other kinds of threats confronting citizens with respect to illness, fire and accidents.

Since neighborhoods have been found to provide a significant context for crime prevention activities, research should address those issues that will enhance our understanding of the neighborhood as a meaningful locus for crime prevention efforts. The relevance of neighborhoods for particular individuals and groups needs to be examined more systematically as well as the linkages between various neighborhood characteristics and outcomes relevant to crime prevention. In particular, consideration should be given to the manner in which crime prevention programs and activities act as a catalyst for neighborhood organized responses which address a fuller

range of problems. Attention should also be given to the most useful interface between police and citizen crime prevention activities in a neighborhood context.

More knowledge is also needed about the impact of the man-made environment on the behavior of criminals as well as the actions and response of citizens. It is particularly the interaction between human behavior and the built environment that needs to be better understood in terms of preventing and controlling crime.

In the 1980's, we should also see more attention devoted to those factors which contribute to the production of criminal behavior. Knowledge concerning the causes and correlates of criminal behavior should suggest potential intervention strategies and policies for the prevention of crime. These need to be based on accurate information concerning the role of social, economic, psychological and physiological factors that influence criminality. Continued attention will need to be given to the relationships between criminal behavior and drugs and alcohol; unemployment; and family and community factors along with issues relating to race, crime and social policy. There is a recognition that research in this area will need to be long-term in character often requiring interdisciplinary inquiries if our knowledge concerning the causes of crime is to be adequately developed.

In general, future crime prevention research should be linked explicitly to the body of research findings that have already been developed in order to establish a cumulative and integrated research approach in these areas.

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